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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 2008

In Today's Papers

Turkish NGOs Call on Political Parties to Compromise
All papers report that on Wednesday, Turkey's leading non-governmental organizations issued a joint statement warning against polarization in the country, emphasizing that everyone had "to take a step back from their current positions" to contribute to the atmosphere of compromise. The Presidents of the Turkish Union of Chambers (TOBB), the Confederation of Public Workers' Unions (Kamu-Sen), the Confederation of Labor Unions (Turk-Is), the Confederation of Tradesmen's Unions (TESK), the Confederation of Employers' Unions (TISK), the Agricultural Chambers' Union (TZOB,) and the Workers Rights Union (Hak-Is) released a statement in Istanbul calling for "common sense." TOBB Chairman Rifat Hisarciklioglu announced, "These days, Turkey is going through a difficult test of democracy and law. Turkey should quickly shift its focus on economic and social problems, particularly unemployment. Turkey is a democratic, secular and social state based on the constitutional rule of law. We must protect these principles; they cannot be a matter of politics which can be discussed freely." The statement also said, "Closing political parties restricts the freedoms of institutions and individuals; this harms the democratic process instead of strengthening the democratic process."

Prime Minister Erdogan, speaking to reporters in Albania yesterday, said he agrees with the NGOs' message, "We are ready to take the lead toward common sense. I have never been opposed to talking to opposition leaders." Opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal said he has been calling for meetings with the AKP since 2002, but that Erdogan has ignored him. "We cannot back the AKP's changes to the constitution because the changes are being proposed during proceedings in a court case; our support would mean the CHP is giving a green light to the AKP's violation of secularism," said Baykal. Opposition far right MHP Deputy Group Chairman Oktay Vural said the NGOs' call should be directed to the PM and AKP, who Vural calls, "the architects of the polarization and tension in the

country."

Liberal Radikal comments "the AKP is ready to go to a referendum to stop the lawsuit for closure," but "there are fears that a referendum could trigger a military coup." The CHP wants the AKP to ease concerns over the attempts to undermine secularism. Radikal writes, "The annulment of headscarf reforms is one step that could ease the concerns of the CHP."

President Gul Will Meet Opposition Leaders Thursday
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Yeni Safak and others report President Abdullah Gul invited CHP leader Deniz Baykal and MHP leader Devlet Bahceli to talks at the presidential palace on Thursday. Papers report political circles in Ankara, however, speculate the president wants to reduce the tensions surrounding the constitutional changes and the Ergenekon investigation. Gul will meet with the DSP tomorrow; he will meet with far right BBP and leftist ODP in the coming days. Hurriyet, Sabah, and Radikal report sources close to the president said Gul did not invite the pro-Kurdish DTP because they met recently. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet claims Gul will meet with the DTP after today's talks with the CHP and the MHP.

TGS Chief General Buyukanit in Northern Cyprus
Hurriyet, Sabah, Milliyet, Cumhuriyet, Radikal, Zaman, Yeni Safak and others: All papers report that General Buyukanit paid his first visit as Chief of General Staff to the Turkish Republic of Cyprus (TRNC). Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports General Buyukanit told TRNC President Mehmet Ali Talat, "Turkish troops will remain on the island until a lasting and fair solution to the Cyprus problem is found." Yesterday's Sabah reported that Greek-Cypriot leader Dimitris Christophias told the Greek Cypriot press, "I have no

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expectations regarding Buyukanit's visit. As a matter of fact, I am sorry to hear that he is coming to the island."

Meanwhile, mainstream Sabah reports that mine sweeping at the Lokmaci Gate began yesterday morning. After the mines are cleared, all the buildings in the area will be renovated.

Education Ministry Recommended Pirated School Books
Liberal Radikal reports that the Book Translators' Association (CEVBIR) and the Union of Publishers (YAYBIR) checked classical books from their "100 Basic Books" list, which were recommended by the National Education Ministry, and realized most of the translations were pirated from previous translations. Moreover, they were disturbed to find that many of the classics' chapters were shortened for no reason. Radikal notes that CEVBIR and YAYBIR will send their reports to the Education Ministry in order to ban the sale of pirated books.

Editorial Commentary on Iraq

"Iraq's Other War"

Sami Kohen wrote in mainstream Milliyet (3/27): "It first started in Basra and now has spread to other Iraqi cities. This is a different type of war; this war is not between Iraqis and Americans or Shiites and Sunnis. Basra is now under the control of Shiite militias loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr. However, there are other Shiite rival groups involved, including gangs accused of corruption and other illegal activities. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has initiated an operation to clean out all kinds of illegal gangs from Basra. Maliki issued a 72-hour deadline for these groups to lay down their arms, but al-Sadr has defied this deadline and has called for riots.

Unless a ceasefire is established, Iraq is on the verge of a serious civil war. This event is a test for the Iraqi central government's authority. If the Maliki government fails this test, the consequences will damage the central authority's legitimacy and endanger Iraq's unity and integrity."

"What Is Happening in Iraq?"

Sedat Sertoglu wrote in mainstream Aksam (3/27): "In a move that surprises no one, the Iraqi army has launched an operation against

Moktada al-Sadr's Basra Mehdi Army. There are constant reports about heavy clashes and a serious number of casualties. Prime Minister Maliki's motive in his decision to go ahead with the military operation against the Shiite groups is oil. Because these Shiite groups were fighting each other for control of oil resources, the Iraqi PM wanted the central authority to take control. There is a common saying in Iraq, "Whoever controls Basra controls oil." Even though al-Sadr's militias were asked to lay down their arms within 72 hours, it does not seem likely to happen. By arming both Shiite groups, Iran is the key actor in this game. If al-Sadr does not respect the ceasefire, then all of Iraq will likely turn to a bloodbath. In that case, the U.S. will lose its 'all is well in Iraq' argument and thus Iran will be able to kill many birds with one stone."

TV Highlights
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- On Monday, the Constitutional Court will complete its preliminary examination of the prosecutor's indictment related to the lawsuit for closing down the AKP.
- Turkish security forces have launched an operation backed by Cobra helicopters against approximately 300 PKK terrorists in the eastern province of Tunceli.
- The Turkish Parliament has passed the bill known as the "Cargill

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Law," which allows the use of agricultural areas for non-agricultural purposes.

International News

- Iraqi forces are fighting militants loyal to Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr in Basra and Baghdad. More than 60 people have died and hundreds have been wounded in the clashes.
- Lebanese officials will boycott an Arab League summit in Syria this month to protest a political deadlock that has left Lebanon without a president since November.
- Amnesty International will investigate the death of Adem Ozdamar from Hagen, Germany. Ozdamar died from injuries he received while in police custody.

WILSON